

mm



Department of State

POL 14 Viet S
XR POL 23-9 Viet S

1482

TELEGRAM

CONFIDENTIAL 857

PAGE 01 SAIGON 11600 221318Z

42

ACTION: EA-20

INFO: OCT-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-09 H-02 INR-08 L-04 NSAE-00

NSC-10 P-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SS-20 USIA-12 IO-16 UPW-01

RSR-01 1109 W

013863:

R 221100Z JUL 71

FMI AMEMBASSY SAIGON

TO: SECSTATE WASHDC 7664

INFO: AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

CINCPAC

AMCONSUL DANANG

USDEL FRANCE

AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU

AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAIGON 11600

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

KATHMANDU FOR AMBASSADOR BUNKER

SUBJ: EMBASSY COMMENT ON THIEU'S JULY 19 PRESS CONFERENCE

REF: SAIGON 11472 POL 2-5 Viet S

1. SUMMARY: THIEU HAS APPARENTLY BESTED MINH IN AN EXCHANGE OF ACCUSATIONS ON THE 1963 COUP. END SUMMARY.

2. THIEU'S JULY 19 PRESS CONFERENCE WAS HIS FIRST SINCE THE END OF LAM SON 719, AND WAS ORGANIZED OSTENSIBLY TO REBUT GENERAL DUONG VAN MINH'S JULY 10 VERSION OF THE 1963 COUP (REFTEL), AND IN PARTICULAR MINH'S ALLEGATIONS THAT THIEU SHOULD ACCEPT PARTIAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR DIEM'S DEATH. THE SENSATIONAL TREATMENT GIVEN IN THE LOCAL PRESS TO THE DISPUTE BETWEEN THIEU AND MINH OVER THE 1963 COUP UNDERSCORES THE EXTENT TO WHICH THIS EVENT REMAINS A LIVE ISSUE WITH THE VIETNAMESE ELECTORATE.

DEPT OF STATE A/CDC/MR

REVIEWED BY Ivan Gube DATE 1/26/82

PDS ☐ or XD ☐ EXT. DATE

TS AUTH. REASON(S)

ENDORSE EXISTING MARKINGS ☐

IF CLASSIFIED ☒ RELEASABLE ☒

RELEASE DENIED ☐

11600 FOR FOI EXEMPTIONS

2

CONFIDENTIAL

7-22-71
Saigon 11600



Department of State **TELEGRAM**

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02. SAIGON: 11600 221318Z.

3. THIEU'S VIGOROUS AND EMOTIONAL DEFENSE IN THE PRESS CONFERENCE OF HIS ROLE IN THE 1963 COUP PROBABLY SUCCEEDED IN BLUNTING MINH'S CHALLENGE TO HIS STANDING AMONG THE LOCAL CATHOLIC ELECTORATE WHICH IS STILL HYPERSENSITIVE OVER THE ISSUE OF DIEM'S ASSASSINATION. BY EMPHASIZING MINH'S RELUCTANCE TO ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY AS JUNTA CHAIRMAN FOR DIEM'S DEATH AND BY NOTING HIS WEAK LEADERSHIP IN

THE INTERIM GOVERNMENT THIEU MANAGED TO STRIKE BACK AT MINH AT PROBABLY HIS MOST VULNERABLE POINT--HIS ALLEGED POOR LEADERSHIP QUALITIES.

4. INDEED, MINH DISPLAYED SENSITIVITY TO THIEU'S CHARGES OF "BUCK-PASSING" BY RELEASING A PRESS STATEMENT JULY 21 WHICH EMPHASIZED THAT MINH "HAS ALWAYS ACCEPTED FULL RESPONSIBILITY AND PLACES THE BLAME ON NO ONE ELSE." MINH ALSO DENIED THAT HE HAD EVER ACCUSED THIEU OF IMPLICATION IN DIEM'S DEATH AND EXPLAINED

THAT SUCH STATEMENTS WERE THE PERSONAL "DEDUCTIONS" OF CORRESPONDENTS. (COMMENT: MINH'S OFFICE COULD EASILY HAVE CORRECTED THESE "DEDUCTIONS" EARLIER, SINCE THE JULY 10 INTERVIEWERS GAVE COPIES OF THEIR STORIES TO GENERAL MINH'S PRESS OFFICE WHICH THEN TRANSLATED AND REISSUED THEM--APPARENTLY WITHOUT CORRECTION--AS PRESS RELEASES.)

5. IN ADDITION TO CORNERING MINH ON THE ISSUE OF PRESIDENT DIEM'S ASSASSINATION, THIEU MAY ALSO HAVE SOUGHT IN THE PRESS CONFERENCE TO IMPROVE HIS POPULAR IMAGE AS A MORE PERSONABLE FIGURE. THE CONFERENCE, HELD AT THE JGS MESS, WAS NOTABLY CASUAL AND THIEU EMPHASIZED ITS PERSONAL ASPECTS BY REFERRING REPEATEDLY TO HIMSELF AS "A COLONEL" AND DELIBERATELY ELIMINATING PRESIDENTIAL INSIGNIA AND STATE TELEVISION COVERAGE. THIEU WENT TO CONSIDERABLE PAINS TO INDULGE AND HUMOR THE PRESS AND NO DOUBT THEREBY TRIED TO BOOST HIS RELATIONS WITH LOCAL CORRESPONDENTS IN GENERAL. THIEU'S REMARKS APPEARED WELL PREPARED AND AMERICAN CORRESPONDENTS WHO WERE PRESENT STATED THAT HE HANDLED HIMSELF IMPRESSIVELY. BERGER.

CONFIDENTIAL